

MASTER OF EDUCATION THESIS DEFENSE

Donna Wigmore From Sisyphus to Métis: The Transformative Power of Literary Métissage

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a heart centered literary métissage; a braiding together of pieces of writing in which I explore three paths of inquiry. The first path of inquiry concerns my father and memories of conversations I had with him about war and God when I was between the ages of ten and twelve. I wanted to tell this part of his story and bring more love and honour to the memory of my father by exploring the conversations we had. The second path of inquiry involves my experience of God's love. I had always intellectually accepted that God loved me, but I did not feel the love of God. I had a theory that writing my memories of the talks with Dad might help me dismantle whatever walls stood in between me and the love that I believed waited on the other side. On this path of inquiry, I used my personal journal entries and researcher's notebook. As the second path of inquiry moved to the background the first one consumed my writing life, a third path emerged. This thesis is a collection of stories that have been told again and again over the course of many years. In this process of retelling, the stories themselves became reified. To bring them back to life, they had to be approached from new angles with new ways of writing. It was also necessary for a critical consciousness to be brought to this inquiry. Throughout this time, the thesis process was monitored by the use of a researcher's notebook where reflections on the journey and connections between the process of writing and day-to-day life were recorded. This part of the writing produced a third path of inquiry, regarding identity. It is on this third path where the process of transformation began. Through the process of exploring literary métissage, which was a weaving back and forth between memory and subjective experience of memory, along with reflection on both of these, a flexible view of self began to evolve. My concept of identity shifted from a single, fixed thing to a multiple, open one. Schwandt (2007) describes the postmodern view of self as "always fragmented, never integrated, never fixed, always becoming" (p. 144). This shift in identity was born out of the gifts of métissage: the blending of literary genres and the flexibility of thinking that comes out of leaving a dualistic perspective. This concept of self made it possible to approach the past in a way that allowed things to be seen that once were invisible. Several types of writing were employed to research the memories: poetry, narrative, personal journals, letters, and a researcher's notebook. This mixture of genres proved to be very important to the path of the work and led to discoveries that could not have otherwise been made. Literary métissage embraces a blurring of literary genres, and in this work the poems are narratives and the narratives have many poetic qualities. Each genre was used as a tool to help uncover the truths which were being sought. This literary métissage is followed by an exegesis where the life writing is connected to the literature on life writing, literary métissage, and attendant issues of identity, memory, and transformation. The transformation which came out of my work was initiated by reflection on writing and memories, but a very important catalyst in this process was the communion with other life writers. The perspectives on self of other life writers and the gifts of wisdom which they have brought back from inner journeys have been a guide for my work. I have often felt like Frodo Baggins, the unlikely hero of *The Hobbit*, setting off for an adventure somewhat unwittingly. The life writers have been like Gandalf to me, showing up when I was in dire need, and getting me to the next place in my journey. I cannot imagine how I would have managed without them. I am grateful to every writer for sharing this gorgeous communion. It has been my hope that if compassion comes to my father and to myself through this writing, then it would be extended to other veterans and other children of veterans. I offer my writing in the sincere wish that the reader's heart and mind are engaged. Natalie Goldberg explains why we write memoir: "We surrender ourselves so others can feel what we felt and be enlarged" (Goldberg, 2007, p. 147). In this way, I hope to bridge the gap from my particular story to universal stories of war, love and faith. Keywords: literary métissage, transformation, memoir, autobiographical writing, identity.